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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the study plan for the National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) and outlines some of the preliminary results that have been determined to date. According to the paper, the NAVE has identified five broad areas in which to conduct research: (1) implementation of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act; (2) vocational education for special populations; (3) conditions of secondary vocational education; (4) conditions of postsecondary vocational education; and (5) the changing economy and its skill requirements. A section of the paper describes the studies being conducted to evaluate these five areas. The paper also points out some of the constraints of the NAVE, such as the following: (1) it is being conducted internally by the U.S. Department of Education rather than through a third-party contract; (2) postsecondary and secondary vocational training are pitted against each other; (3) the study plan does not seem to address the primary responsibilities historically assigned to vocational education; and (4) certain statements in the study plan seem to question the need for vocational education. A short section sketching some preliminary results shows that nearly all students take some type of vocational education, accounting for 20 percent of the courses that are taken by the average student who graduates from high school. The study data also indicate that vocational students take vocational education by adding credits, whereas college-bound students cut into their academic core subjects to take vocational education. Finally, the data suggest that vocational enrollments are declining and that more work is needed in giving disadvantaged students access to vocational education. (KC)

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THE BATTLE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: AN EVALUATION OF THE STUDY PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT (NAVE) AND ITS FIRST YEAR IMPLEMENTATION

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Paper presented at the American Education Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 5-9, 1988.

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THE BATTLE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: AN EVALUATION OF THE STUDY PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT (NAVE) AND ITS FIRST YEAR IMPLEMENTATION

BACKGROUND:

"Quality vocational and job training programs are an important part of the Nation's system of Education, and the decision to propose an end to direct Department of Education support in this area was a difficult one. However, current budget circumstances make it even more difficult to justify the singling out of vocational instruction--or any other particular part of the regular school curriculum--to receive categorical funding from the Department of Education.

In the first half of the century, the Federal Government was a major force in providing vocational training to the Nation's young people. Over the years, however, this situation has changed dramatically, and the Department of Education now is a very minor actor in the vocation education enterprise. State and local governments spend about $11 for every ED dollar spent on vocational education. In addition the Department of labor spends about $3.2 billion on job training programs, and corporations spend an additional $30 billion - $40 billion on training programs for their employees. In view of this situation, the question must be asked whether an annual expenditure of more than $800 million for vocational education is a good use of Federal education funds. And the answer must be no."

With this landmark statement which appeared in the Department of Education's Fiscal Year 1988 Budget Summary, the Secretary of Education sent a clear message to congress and the legislature as well as to the vocational community at large. In effect vocational education had been zeroed out of the federal budget for 1988, this in light of the recent passage 3 years earlier of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act in the late fall of 1984. The purposes of the Perkins Act are ostensibly to: (1) assist the States to expand, improve, modernize and develop quality vocational education programs in order to meet the needs of the Nation's existing and future work force for marketable skills and to improve productivity and promote economic growth;

(2) assure that individuals who are inadequately served under vocational education programs are assured access to quality vocational education programs, especially individuals who are disadvantaged who are handicapped men women who are entering nontraditional occupations, adults who are in need of training and retraining individuals who are single parents of homemakers, individuals with limited English proficiency, and individuals who are incarcerated in correctional institutions;

(3) promote greater cooperation between public agencies and the private sector in preparing individuals for employment in promoting the quality of vocational education in the States, and in making the vocational system more responsive to the labor market in the States;

(4) improve the academic foundations of vocational students and to aid in the application of newer technologies (including the use of computers) in terms of employment or occupational goals;

(5) provide vocational education services to train, retrain and upgrade employed and unemployed workers in new skills for which there is a demand in that State or employment market;

(6) assist the most economically depressed areas of a State to raise employment and occupational competencies of its citizens;

(7) to assist the State to utilize a full range of supportive services, special programs, and guidance counseling and placement to achieve the basic purposes of this Act;

(8) improve the effectiveness of consumer and homemaking education and to reduce the limiting effects of sex-role stereotyping on occupations, job skills, levels of competency, and careers; and

(9) authorize national programs designed to meet designated vocational education needs and to strengthen the vocational education research process.

Given the backdrop, the new vocational education law (P.L. 98-524) passed in 1984, followed by a zero budget request by the Secretary in 1987 for fiscal year 1988, we come face to face with Section 403 of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act which mandates that the Department of Education conduct a National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE).

The assessment is to provide descriptions and evaluations in nine specific areas: (a) the vocational education services delivered under the Act, (b) the Act's effects on modernizing the Nation's vocational education system, (c) the resources needed to meet the Nation's job training needs, (d) the coordination of vocational education with employment and training activities in the States, (e) the impact of vocational education on academic skills and employment opportunities, (f) the effectiveness of vocational education programs for individuals with limited proficiency in English, (g) the coordination of vocational education for disadvantaged and handicapped individuals, (h) the skills and competencies identified by the States to assess their vocational programs, and (i) the effectiveness of the Federal bilingual vocational training programs.

To accomplish this mandate, the U.S. Department of Education established the National Assessment of Vocational Education, housed in the Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation with a budget of about $3.7 million. The study will prepare a final report to Congress due in January 1989. The NAVE has identified five broad areas in which to conduct research. These are:

- **Implementation of the Perkins Act.** Determine the direct effects of the Perkins Act on State administration of vocational education and local practice. The area is also concerned with identifying the overall capacity of State and local vocational education systems to address the priorities identified in the perkins Act, including gaining access to high-quality vocational education for special populations and stimulating program improvement.

- **Vocational Education for Special Populations.** Focus on groups identified in the legislation as needing more or better services. These groups include the handicapped, the disadvantaged (including the limited-English proficient--LEP), women, single parents/ displaced homemakers, and adult immigrants (or others) enrolled in programs of bilingual vocational education.

- **Conditions of Secondary Vocational Education.** Determine the academic and employment outcomes of secondary vocational education, and examine in some depth the effects of education reform, quality of vocational programming, the changing student body, and other critical factors affecting current secondary practice.

- **Conditions of Postsecondary Vocational Education.** Examine the effectiveness of postsecondary vocational education in delivering effective training, and linking that training to jobs and economic development. Particular attention will be devoted to the connections between schools and employers and the effects of Federal and State subsidies on education and training choices.

- **The Changing Economy and Its Skill Requirements.** Examine the responsiveness of the education and training system to changes in the economy and the demographic composition of the labor force, comparing vocational education to other sources of skill training.[1]

This paper examines the study plan as well as the interim results of RFPs which have been let under NAVE keeping in mind that:

- NAVE is being conducted internally by the U.S. Department of Education rather than through a third party contract.

- The assessment study staff has operational ties to and is housed within the federal Office of Planning Budget and Evaluation (OPBE), the office which prepared the justification for eliminating federal vocational education funds.

- The NAVE study plan provides instances where staff have added conclusions to research studies that the staff has yet to endorse by its own work.

- Job placement, viewed as a significant accomplishment by vocational training, is perceived as a negative.

- Post-secondary vocational training is pitted against secondary vocational training.

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1 United States Department of Education. Study Plan for the National Assessment of Vocational Education. Washington, D.C., December 1986.

- The study plan does not seem to address the primary responsibilities historically assigned to vocational education.
- Certain statements inherent in the study plan seem to question the need for vocational education.
- Measuring the effects of the Perkins Act are difficult since the law was implemented less than three years ago.
- The study plan may be too broad and the assessment may ignore the fact that while federal funds only make up a small portion of total vocational education dollars, local leaders follow federal policy when designing programs.

RESULTS:

The first interim report on the National Assessment of Vocational Education was released in January of 1988 with a second interim report slated for July of 1988. An external Advisory Panel has also been formed to review the on-going work of NAVE and to provide comments and input to the reports. This national advisory panel consists of vocational and non-vocational educators, public policy analysts, administrators and research experts.

The report itself is a progress report detailing (1) the initial information which resulted from the research to date and (2) the issues to be discussed in the final report. The field data from the NAVE Interim Report provides the following snapshots of information:

Enrollments in High School Vocational Education: transcript analyses and other information has provided a "new portrait" of student enrollment in vocational education.

- **Who Takes Vocational Education?**

  Information presented showed that nearly all students take some type of vocational programming prior to exiting from high school. Participation ranged from 1/2 credit to eight (8) credits or more. Results also indicate that it would be more accurate and informative to distinguish among students by their enrollment in vocational education by examining their plans after high school including their work plans or their plans to pursue postsecondary education.

- **How Much Vocational Education is Taken?**

  Vocational programming accounts for 20 percent of the courses which are taken by the average student who graduates from high school. Differences in the amount of vocational programs taken by students is reflective of their post high school plans. Those going directly into a job have taken more vocationally specific courses than those bound for postsecondary education. Surprisingly, it was found that college-bound students account for nearly half of all vocational enrollments.

- **What Vocational Education is Taken?**

  The preliminary data suggest that vocational education courses selected reflect those that are occupationally specific and will result in a job after graduation from high school.

- **Vocational Education and the "New Basics"**

  The study data presented indicate that vocational students and academic students have different tradeoffs in their course selections. Work-bound students accommodate more vocational programs into their schedule by adding credits while college-bound students seeking more vocational courses cut into their academic core subjects.

- **Trends of Enrollment**

  Information presented on enrollment information suggests that vocational enrollments are declining even after adjusting for the national decline in secondary enrollments.

The Disadvantaged and Vocational Education: fully 22 percent of the Perkins funds are targeted to the disadvantaged.

- **What is the Problem?**

  There is limited information on the current ability of disadvantaged persons to access quality vocational training. Data from the NAVE, however, report that blacks and whites enroll in vocational programs at roughly the same rate. Stronger data on the access issue is one of the targets of the NAVE study.

- **Provision of the Perkins Act**

  Both the state agency and the eligible recipients have wide parameters of control in terms of identifying and isolating the population to be served--the disadvantaged. The Perkins Act does allow for mainstreaming or provisions of services in separate settings. Data reported by NAVE, however, suggest that disadvantaged students may not have any greater access to high quality vocational programs. The Act also specifies a set of services that districts and postsecondary institutions receiving federal funds should provide including: guidance and counseling; career development, assessments and transition support. These services are clearly tangential to vocational occupational programming and hence the assessment staff argue, and I think correctly, that this amounts to providing an entitlement for all disadvantaged students to receive the specified services regardless of the availability of federal support.

- **Implementation of the Provisions by State and Localities**

  State officials as well as eligible recipients have the ultimate challenge and responsibility to provide high quality vocational education to the targeted population, the disadvantaged. Data from case studies has provided the following information: (1) separate vocational classes have not be established for disadvantaged students in need; (2) at the postsecondary level emphasis has largely been placed on skill remediation; (3) set-aside funds have been used for academically disadvantaged youth rather than economically disadvantaged youth as was the intention of the legislation; and, (4) eligible recipients have had difficulty using the set-aside Perkins funds because of the matching and excess cost requirements.

Implementation of the Perkins Act. Five interrelated studies are being conducted to bring data to bear on two broad research questions: (1) What have been the effects of the Perkins Act on the practice of vocational education in secondary and postsecondary institutions? and, (2) What is the role of the Perkins Act, in relation to other influences, in serving special populations and carrying out the types of program improvement as envisaged in the Act?

The five studies and their scope of work are detailed below:

- **Exploratory case studies: The Nine-State Study.**

  This nine-state study was initiated in 1985 with the focus being to track the adjustment of states of new or altered provisions set forth in the Perkins legislation including the cap on the use of federal funds, development of state plans and the role and function of the equity coordinator.

- **Survey of State Vocational Education Policy.**

  This portion of the implementation phase entails the mailing of a one-page survey designed to provide descriptive information for all 50 states on allocation of funds, distribution of funds, state resources for vocational education at the secondary level and state mandates for vocational course requirements.

- **Survey of Local Practice and Policy.**

  This study is targeted at the secondary and postsecondary levels and is intended to provide information to address 4 issues: (1) the amount and use of funds for targeted eligible recipients; (2) the commitment to vocational education in terms of funding and relative importance of the federal portion of vocational dollars; and (3) the extent to which eligible recipients have improved practice, recruited students and established links with employers; and, (4) the definition of program improvement.

- **Case Studies of Perkins Act Implementation in States and Localities.**

  A series of 27 case studies of school districts and their postsecondary institutions will provide data to amplify on the research issues already identified in the exploratory case studies and in the state and local survey.

- **Targeting of Federal Vocational Education Funds.**

  This study will provide information in the following areas: (1) the degree to which Perkins provisions are affecting the distribution of federal funds; (2) the consistency of the various provisions of the Act in relation to one another; (3) the effects of the legislation on state and local decision-making; and, (4) the impact of the Perkins legislation on state and local vocational spending.

Access of Special Populations to Vocational Education. This phase of the NAVE research seeks answers to provide information across three broad areas: (1) the access and participation of targeted special populations identified in the law; (2) the unique needs of targeted populations; and, (3) the degree to which federal policy if serving the needs of the targeted eligible recipients.

- **Trends in Enrollment of Special Populations.**

  This study examines the level of involvement of special populations in vocational programming and seeks to develop a model identifying program constructs which would encompass ability, educational expectations and occupational preference. The factors of quality programs and access to quality programs will be discussed in light of the model.

- **Vocational Education and Disadvantaged Persons.**

  A specific proviso of the Perkins legislation is to provide quality vocational programs to disadvantaged eligible recipients using a broad qualification of definition for what constitutes "disadvantagement." This portion of NAVE's work will scope out two additional areas of study -- (1) the range of occupational choices and (2) the assessment of role of transition services.

- **Special Education Students and Vocational Education.**

  Handicapped students are a targeted special population identified in the Act. This dimension of the assessment will speak to: (1) the extent to which handicapped students have equitable access to vocational programs; and, (2) the extent to which handicapped youth are mainstreamed with regular students.

- **Women in Vocational Education.**

  Sex-role stereotyping and economic and sociological bias contribute to the "feminization of poverty." The Perkins Act seeks to overcome barriers which women have experienced in receiving appropriate training which leads to high paying jobs and success in the world of work. Within the confines of the Perkins Act the following issues will be examined: (1) the role of the sex-equity coordinator as specified in the law; (2) the use of funds, growth of programs, and, leveraging of funds; and, (3) the leadership function of the state agency in these activities.

- **Vocational Education for Adults with Limited Proficiency in English (LEP).**

  Congress has asked that NAVE examine the needs of adults who are not proficient in English in recognition of their special needs in terms of occupational skills and job success. NAVE will examine the following issues in order to provide data to the Congress: (1) the needs of the LEP adult population regarding employment training; (2) the status of current training and related services for the LEP population; (3) the effectiveness of current approaches; and, (4) the policy incentives to be offered to state and local agencies to encourage the delivery of more or "more effective" services to LEP adults.

Status of Vocational Education in Secondary Schools. This third research area of NAVE responds to the Congress' question about the improvement of programs and outcomes directly for the students in terms of the following: (1) the scope of vocational education in secondary schools; (2) the occupational and academic outcomes of vocational education; and, (3) the policy alternatives for the improvement of vocational education at the secondary schools.

- **Secondary School Curriculum: Trends and Dimensions of Enrollment.**

  Course and program enrollments in vocational education are fragmented at best at the national level, and it is virtually impossible to track the effects which the reform movement, including the increase of high school graduation requirements, has had on vocational education. This study seeks to establish a methodology to track secondary enrollments.

- **Effects of the Academic Reform Movement.**

  The reform movement has spearheaded changes for all of education notwithstanding vocational education. NAVE will examine the academic reform movement by: (1) detailing the changes in vocational and academic enrollments; (2) describing the population serviced; (3) describing the reform movement in terms of graduation

requirements, minimum basic skills (competency testing), and dual standards for the award of diplomas; and (4) the push for basic skills instruction.

- **Alternative Goals for Vocational Education and Program Effectiveness in Secondary Schools.**

The question of program effectiveness is directly related to the program goals and objectives. Often in vocational education, we, as in other sectors of a school's curriculum, witness poorly articulated goals or indeed competing goals. NAVE has undertaken the development of a new taxonomy for the codification of secondary course offerings. This study will examine: (1) basic goals of secondary vocational education; (2) prevailing structure and goals of vocational education; and, (3) the most effective strategies to accomplish the goals.

- **Training Related Placement.**

Placement in the occupations for which a student is trained has always been one of the tenets of vocational education. NAVE, prior to earlier concerns, has in its interim report indicated "Because training-related placement is a strong predictor of earning for vocational programs that emphasize job skills, placement rates are legitimate measures of program performance." One of the major goals of NAVE research activities is to provide a conceptual framework for occupational placement as it relates to policy.

- **Productivity, Earnings, and Employment.**

That vocational education leads to the nation's economic survivability and viability is a statement that needs no qualifiers. To amplify on the economic discussion, NAVE will seek to provide data on the degree to which training resources are optimally allocated to the secondary and postsecondary vocational and academic sectors. The research will also explore alternative enrollment patterns, vocational programming and delivery systems given the economic constructs.

- **Development of Basic Skills.**

The renewed quest for student performance in the basic skills has provided a charge to the vocational education community in terms of ensuring that basic skills performance of vocational youngsters is not lacking. Indeed many curriculum alignment programs are now under way to reinforce the basic skills within the occupationally specific courses. The NAVE study will provide data on vocational courses and programs where basic skill components can be readily incorporated.

- **Enhancing Academic Skills.**

  Congress again provided a strong mandate to NAVE to examine the interface of vocational education on the academic skills of students and to provide alternative strategies to enhancing and assessing performance. NAVE research will: (1) summarize the current research; (2) determine how vocational programs can reinforce academic skills; and, (3) identify exemplary models and programs and assessment, and evaluation techniques.

- **Teacher Work Force.**

  The undergirding of any reform movement is premised on revitalization of the teaching force. This is also true in the vocational setting. Strengthening the vocational teaching staff, in light of dropping enrollments in vocational programs, must be based on continued professional development and the increase of requirements for both certification and recertification. NAVE will rely to a major degree on secondary analysis of data and literature reviews and papers to profile the demographic and professional characteristics of vocational educators.

Status of Postsecondary Vocational Education. NAVE will provide information across three broad areas: (1) the nature and extent of student enrollment and programs; (2) outcomes; and, (3) federal policy alternatives for improving quality and access to programs.

- **Postsecondary Vocational Enrollment Patterns.**

  Postsecondary vocational enrollment patterns have increased dramatically over the last years. NAVE will profile students enrolled in postsecondary education; describe program completers and non-completers; describe the progression of training; discuss the combining of school and work; articulation between high school programming and post secondary vocational programming; and, the additional sources of vocational post secondary programming via the military and programs offered through JTPA.

- **Postsecondary Training-Related Placement and Earning.**

  These analyzes will mirror the placement and training discussions and research posed earlier in the context of secondary training and placement. Given the more complex nature of the training and preparation, the research methods may not be as straightforward but hopefully should shed some light on data which suggest that enrollments in postsecondary vocational education are increasing while those in secondary vocational education are declining.

- **Comparison of Outstanding and Typical Postsecondary Institutions.**

  One of the areas of research will be to determine if federal funds spent at the postsecondary level can/should be targeted to

encourage the development of high quality programs. The question really is if federal funds can pave the way for program excellence.

- **Performance-Oriented Policies to Improve Postsecondary Vocational Education.**

  Major providers of vocational education at the postsecondary level must almost exclusively rely on student enrollments for their continuing functioning hence there is a competing factor in terms of seeking out and retaining less able students and the pressure to maintain quality programs. NAVE will examine this competing function in the context of federal policy and will amplify on different options incorporating various fiscal, governance, and regulatory strategies for postsecondary vocational programming.

- **Financing of Postsecondary Programs.**

  Postsecondary vocational education receives federal funding support via student loans and in part through Perkins funding. NAVE will examine: (1) the costs of obtaining postsecondary training; (2) the amount of federal aid students receive; and, (3) the degree to which federal aid supports a student's program completion.

Skill Training and the Economy. At the core of the Perkins mandate is the mission to assist the states to expand, improve, modernize and develop quality vocational education programs in order to meet the needs of the nation's existing and future work force for marketable skills and to improve productivity and promote economic growth. NAVE's research agenda includes studying: (1) the differences between various providers, types of training and types of students; (2) the public and private investment in training; (3) the types of training provided by industry; (4) the demographics of training, effectiveness of the training system and access to training; and, (5) the impact of needs on the training system given the national and international economies.

DISCUSSION

Given the above abstract of the results to date and the research agenda detailed by the National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE), one must conclude that the tasks as scoped out are comprehensive and overwhelming in terms of implications for the future funding and the future mission of vocational education as provided under the auspices of the United States Department of Education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act.

The initial concerns expressed regarding the conduct of the study are discussed below:

Concern: NAVE is being conducted internally by the U.S. Department of Education rather than through a third part contract.

Response: Fact

Concern: The assessment study staff has operational ties to and is housed within the federal Office of Planning Budget and Evaluation (OPBE), the office which prepared the justification for eliminating federal vocational education funds.

Response: Fact

Concern: The NAVE study plan provides instances where staff have added conclusions to research studies that the staff has yet to endorse by its own work.

Response: This observation was certainly reflected in the study plan; however, the interim report details the status of the assessment to date and staff interpretations seem to be made, if at all, only in light of the data presented.

Concern: Job placement, viewed as a significant accomplishment by vocational training, is perceived as a negative.

Response: Great care was taken to provide information in the interim report on job placement. "Because training-related placement is a strong predictor of earning for vocational programs that emphasize job skills, placement rates are legitimate measures of program performance.

Concern: Post-secondary vocational training is pitted against secondary vocational training.

Response: Any inferential statements negatively comparing postsecondary vocational training to secondary vocational training are absent in the preliminary findings and a factual treatment of the results is given.

Concern: The study plan does not seem to address the primary responsibilities historically assigned to vocational education.

Response: Although the study plan may have omitted areas, the interim report goes well beyond the confines of the Perkins legislation to speak to the broader issues of vocational education programming.

Concern: Certain statements inherent in the study plan seem to question the need for vocational education.

Response: The interim report is absent any questioning about the need for vocational education as an entity but rather the report speaks to issues in the definition and delivery of vocational education for targeted eligible recipients defined in the law.

Concern: Measuring the effects of the Perkins Act are difficult since the law was implemented less than three years ago.

Response: Fact. While the assessment staff are providing a snapshot in time, there is no doubt that data is being provided on a dynamic system which has not yet had the benefit of one five-year cycle of implementation.

Concern: The study plan may be too broad and the assessment may ignore the fact that while federal funds only make up a small portion of total vocational education dollars, local leaders follow federal policy when designing programs.

Response: There is no doubt that the scope of work of the assessment is extremely broad; however, it may be too early to sumarily assume that the federal dollars, comprising about 10% of each state's federal outlay for vocational education, are driving the design of programs at the state and local levels.

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